

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 11th October, 2023

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nic Bhranair (Chairperson);
Alderman Lawlor;
Councillors Bunting, Canavan, Douglas,
Duffy, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Lyons,
Maskey, McAteer, McCabe, McCormick,
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, I. McLaughlin,
McMullan, Murray and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. S. O'Regan, Employability and Skills Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 13th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th October, subject to the following addition: The Chief Executive agreed to consider, in conjunction with the City Solicitor, any internal measures which could be taken in respect of Members posting restricted information on social media, particularly when there were commercial sensitivities.

Declarations of Interest

The Chairperson declared an interest regarding item 3.a) Major Events Update, in that she was a Board Member of An tOireachtas and left the meeting whilst the item was being considered.

In relation to item 5.a) Employability and Skills Workplan, Councillor Duffy declared an interest, in that he worked for an organisation that was represented on the Labour Market Partnership and was also associated with the Employment Academies and left the room whilst the item was being considered.

Councillor Flynn also declared an item in item 5.a) Employability and Skills Workplan, in that he worked for All-State but confirmed his interest was non-pecuniary.

Matters Referred Back from Council/ Motions

Street Art Walls

The Committee was advised that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 29th August, had referred the following motion which had been proposed by Councillor McKeown and seconded by Councillor Doherty to the Committee for consideration:

“The Council recognises the transformative benefits that street art can have on communities and welcomes the enhancement of spaces across the city through the creation of public artwork, such as in entries in Belfast City Centre, across the Holylands, and on utility boxes through the Belfast Canvas project. In many places, works have become tourist attractions and are creating a real sense of civic pride. However, the Council also acknowledges the concern and frustration that particular types of graffiti such as tagging can cause to communities, and the cost of its removal.

To encourage a vibrant street art culture in this city and help people to develop the skills required to realise this, the Council believes that it is important to facilitate the creation of such art in a safe, legal and positive way, enabling creative expression through this medium and reducing the proliferation of antisocial graffiti.

This Council will therefore work with the street art community to support the continuing development of a positive street art culture in this city and, in particular, will provide ‘street art walls’ which will allow people to create artwork legally. In addition to identifying Belfast City Council property to facilitate this, the Council will also work with public, private and third sector partners to identify locations across the city which can be used freely by people for ad hoc street art and collaborative projects.

The Council will also work with street artists and groups, youth providers and other partners to engage with people who could benefit from getting involved in street art and support mentoring and skills development to empower them to express themselves through this route. It will also consult and work with artists and groups to develop a better and evolving understanding of how it can support street art.

Taking this approach, the Council aims to support the vibrant street art scene in Belfast and help develop the next generation of street artists to enable it to continue to flourish, while reducing the impact and cost of negative graffiti by encouraging a positive alternative.”

During discussion Members raised the importance of maintenance, assurance and process in the development of further street art, consultation with businesses and engagement of communities, together with the tangible benefits of street art.

Accordingly, the Committee adopted the Motion and agreed that a report on how this would be facilitated, resourced and managed would be submitted to the Committee for consideration, to include best practice examples, consultation with businesses and community engagement.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following two items were restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following two items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

(Councillor Duffy in the Chair.)

Major Events Update

The Committee was provided with an update on the Major Events Programme.

The Director of Economic Development pointed out that, since the report had been published, the UK and Ireland's bid to host the tournament in five years' time had been formally approved by UEFA.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development explained further the bidding process for the Oireachtas na Samhna Festival.

Proposal

Proposed by Councillor McCormick,
Seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin,

That the Committee agrees not to proceed with the Oireachtas na Samhna Bid or consider the allocation of the required financial commitment as part of the 2024/25 rate setting process and that a report be submitted to a future meeting in relation to the tangible economic benefits the Festival would bring to the Council and its ratepayers.

On a vote, five Members voted for the proposal and twelve against and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to adopt the recommendations contained within the report:

- Approved the request to proceed with the Oireachtas na Samhna Bid and consider the allocation of the required financial commitment as part of the 2024/25 rate setting process;
- Noted the update on One Young World;
- Noted the update on Christmas 2023 planning; and
- Noted the update regarding the UK and Ireland bid to host the European Football Championships in 2028.

(Councillor Nic Bhranair in the Chair.)

Embracing the Belfast Waterfront – Belfast Waterfront Framework

The Director of City Regeneration and Development introduced a report on the emerging Belfast Waterfront Framework as developed by the Waterfront Task Group.

The Senior Development Manager presented an overview of the Promenade Framework Update.

During discussion, in response to a Member's question regarding community representation on the Taskforce, the officers advised that this would be considered as part of the next stage of the process.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Approved the Belfast Waterfront Framework as developed by the Waterfront Task Group and noted the information provided in the presentation on the Framework;
- Noted the ongoing work on project prioritisation and development currently underway by a number of stakeholders within the Waterfront Task Group, recognising that this would remain an iterative process as other opportunities and projects came forward;
- Noted the update on the Cork Belfast Shared Island Development Fund proposal as agreed by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in August 2023; and
- Agreed to the attendance of the Chairperson at the launch of the Waterfront Framework.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Eastern Transport Plan Consultation Response

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) 2035 and to agree a draft Council response to the current public engagement exercise that commenced with the launch of the Plan on 4th September 2023.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the update on the ETP 2035; and
- Agree the proposed Council response to the initial public engagement exercise that is currently underway.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 As members will be aware the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is developing the Eastern Transport Plan 2035 (previously known as the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) for the city and four of the surrounding local authorities with the consultants Atkins assisting in the detailed work on what will be the statutory Transport Plan for the city.

Plan renaming

3.2 Following consideration of stakeholder feedback and acknowledgement that the new Transport Plan will cover a greater geographical area than that of the previous 2004 version, the DfI Permanent Secretary took the decision to change the name of the Plan from the BMTP to the Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) 2035. The Council is disappointed that it was not consulted on this change nor was the Project Board on which the Council is represented. The Department is hoping that this renaming will result in increased levels of community engagement across the Plan Area.

3.3 The Committee received a presentation on the ETP from Mr A. Rafferty (DfI) and Mr D. Murray (Atkins) on 28th June 2023 which set out the background to the Plan; an overview

of the approach; delivery timescales and phasing; and details of the draft Vision, Objectives and General Principles. Mr Rafferty agreed to receive further technical questions from the Committee to which DfI would provide a response. A letter was sent to Mr Rafferty from Democratic Services on 21st September 2023 which set out the queries raised at the Committee together with other technical questions concerning the relationship between the ETP and the Belfast Local Development Plan (see [Appendix 1](#)).

ETP launch and public engagement exercise

- 3.4 On 4th September 2023 the Department publicly announced its intention to prepare the ETP, a *'new transport plan that will set the framework for making transport policy and investment decisions up until 2035'* and *'aims to ensure that the transport network meets the needs of the people and businesses living, working and visiting the ETP area, both now and into the future'*. An 8-week public engagement exercise commenced with this announcement and seeks views of individuals and organisations on the draft Vision and Objectives for the Plan. This initial consultation exercise closes on 30th October 2023.
- 3.5 At this early stage of the Plan's development the Department is seeking to ascertain people's views on:
- The problems we need to solve (Challenges);
 - The end goal we want to achieve (Our Vision); and
 - How we will get there (Our Objectives and Guiding Principles)

An online [Engagement Survey](#) has been published by the Department and is primarily targeted at individuals although organisations are able to participate. The questions are typically generic and high-level reflecting the aspirational elements of the Plan and as such, understandably, there is a lack of operational detail on specific policies, proposals and initiatives that will be brought forward as the Plan develops. The survey questions are included at [Appendix 2](#) for information. There will be further opportunities for the Council and the public to provide formal responses to these issues as the preparation of the ETP progresses e.g. at the Draft Plan stage.

Council response

- 3.6 Internal consultation on the engagement survey has been undertaken with a range of sections and services within the Council – Climate, Economic Development, City Regeneration & Development, Neighbourhood Services and Estates. There is broad support for the approach taken and

direction of travel the Department is proposing however it has been reiterated that there will need to be more detailed consideration of the specific policies, proposals and initiatives that emerge as the Plan develops and in particular how these might impact upon schemes currently in development.

- 3.7 Council support for the ETP will in part be influenced by the Department's response to the queries raised in the letter of 21st September 2023 (Appendix 1). Given that the engagement survey is primarily targeted at individuals it is suggested that rather than completing the survey the Council submits a written response outlining any issues arising from this initial consultation and the approach proposed (see [Appendix 3](#)).

3.8 **Financial and Resource Implications**

None associated with this report.

3.9 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

None associated with this report.”

The Committee agreed to adopt the recommendations contained within the report.

Correspondence from the Department for Infrastructure

The Committee was informed that correspondence had been received from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) in relation to matters which had been raised by the Council, including the provision of a controlled crossing at Knockbreda Road and the creation of Rosetta Way Quietway; and a letter from the DfI Deputy Secretary (Transport and Road Asset Management) which provided context in advance of the planned Divisional Road Managers Autumn Update to the Council.

The Committee:

- Noted the responses which had been received from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) in relation to a Motion from the Council;
- Noted the draft Council response to the Eastern Transport Plan that had been presented to the Committee and the correlation it had with the Motion, and agreed to close the Motion; and
- Noted the correspondence from DfI in advance of the DfI Roads presentation of the Autumn Statement.

**Correspondence received from the
Department for Communities**

The Committee noted the correspondence which had been received from the Department for Communities, in response to its concerns in relation to the Access and Inclusion Fund timeframe (copy available [here](#)).

Growing Business and the Economy

Employability and Skills Workplan - mid-year update

The Committee considered the undernoted report and associated appendices:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise members of a range of activity undertaken in since April 2023 to support skills development, economic engagement and job outcomes for key target groups.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the work undertaken in the financial year to date and the positive employability and jobs outcomes associated with this work**
- **Approve the allocation of Labour Market Partnership (LMP) resources for Bridges to Progression and note the proposals to seek proposals from delivery partners to provide targeted support that can improve outcomes for participants.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Employment Academies

Members will be aware that Employment Academies are one of the key instruments that the Council’s Employability and Skills team utilises to support residents to secure a new job or a better job. While the content of Employment Academies varies from programme to programme, there are a number of consistent components, namely:

- **Pre-academy matching and selection to ensure all individuals who participate have a meaningful chance of securing employment after successful completion**
- **Employer-led vocational skills, qualifications, licences and training related to the specific job role**

- In-situ work sampling/work placements
- Provision of additional supports to undergo and complete the academy, from equipment and clothing through to childcare, travel and subsistence
- Employability support particularly focused on the final employment interview (all candidates are guaranteed a job interview).

3.2 Given the volatility in the labour market – and the limited financial resources available to undertake the work – our work plan is driven by a range of factors including:

- The opportunity presented by a number of growth sectors to support participants into roles with higher earning potential. In recognition of the additional skills support work required, these interventions tend to have a higher per capita cost but offer a positive return on investment in terms of salary levels for those successful in finding work following programme completion
- Ongoing need to work with employers to convince them of the value of alternative approaches to finding talent other than pre-existing qualifications and/or experience. This is particularly the case for our work in new sectors – specifically those that have tended to think ‘degree first’ and have not considered alternative routes
- Employers with entry level and lower paid jobs – particularly in sectors such as hospitality and social care – continue to experience significant challenges in finding workers. Officers are working with these employers to consider issues such as terms and conditions and payment of the real living wage in order to attract and retain talent, aligned with the implementation of the Belfast Business Promise
- Opportunities to support existing employees who are in low-paid work and/or underemployed through upskilling interventions – and thereby embedding a skills escalator by creating additional entry-level roles.

3.3 In the course of this financial year, we expect that the Employment Academies will engage around 500 participants with at least 70% expected to gain employment/self-employment across a range of sectors – see additional details below:

<u>Employment Academy</u>	<u>Participants started up to mid-Sept 23</u>	<u>Places to allocate Oct 23-Mar 24</u>
Working at Sea	10	40
Tech	24	11
Business Services	23	-
Fibre	-	12
Transport	110	12
Health & Social Care/Working with Children	21	69
Working with Children – Irish Medium	12	28
Health & Social Care/Working with Children Upskilling	86	94
Construction	12	12
TOTALS	298	278

3.4 Key insights on the relevant academies identified include:

- **Transport:** Over 250 people expressed an interest in participating and 140 made it through following the relevant eligibility checks, information days and preliminary interviews and from this 110 people have been offered a place on a Transport Employment Academy. Given that the average timescale to fully complete the Transport Academy can be up to nine months, we expect that most participants will be ready for employment by early Spring. As this is the fifth year of the Transport Academy work, we are building strong working partnerships with employers that have repeatedly recruited previous programme participants. At a recent information day, employers updated on live opportunities including starting salaries with Category C Licence of £40k plus per annum, moving to £50k plus after upskilling to Category C+E licence (which are mainly resourced by the employer). We are working closely with Transport Academy employers as well as Logistics UK and the

Road Haulage Authority (RHA) to conduct a survey of employers in order to build a profile of future employment opportunities

- **Fibre Optics Academy**: this has been another very popular initiative, with delivery planned in late 2023 and more than 100 people have already expressed an interest in engaging. This sector offers great earning potential: one recent participant moved from unemployment to a Fibre Technician role then Project Manager within nine months, now earning over £50k per annum
- **Tech and Digital Academy**: Two academies are completing with 12 in each which takes the form of a 16-week bootcamp at the end of September 2023. One cohort undertook a pathway in Product Management and the other in Cyber Security. There are a number of employer sponsors engaged including Allstate and Belfast City Council where three of the pilot cohort (from 2022/23) are now working in Digital Services. Subject to employer support, we plan to run a further Tech Academy later in 2023. Running alongside employer engagement, we have been in liaison with a number of the representative bodies including the Software Alliance and the Cyber Security Forum. Our Academies have been promoted extensively amongst their members and employers as we seek to build a sustainable pipeline of demand for subsequent cohorts
- **Business Services Academy**: we are working with Queen's University to deliver bespoke Employment Academies for administration. Following the first programme, 12 people have been offered employment. In addition to the offer of a job, Queen's have committed to providing a Level 2 qualification once they are in post. We are working closely with the university to build the evidence for how a major employer can adapt their recruitment processes and remove qualification criteria as a means of creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce
- **Health and Social Care Academy**: We have responded to changes within the sector by developing a number of new employment academies and upskilling programmes. These include the Classroom Assistant Employment Academy with a Level 3 qualification in Special Educational Needs, Level 3 and Level 5 Classroom Assistant Diplomas in Irish Medium, delivered by Gaelchursaí, and the Level 4 Classroom Assistant qualification delivered in partnership with Stranmillis University College. We will continue to work with key employers including Belfast Health & Social Care Trust, Triangle Housing, Inspire Wellbeing, Sure Start, Sleepy Hollow and a wide

variety of educational settings including primary, secondary, grammar, Special Educational Needs and Irish Medium Schools. Offering the Upskilling Academies is a huge benefit to the sector as it encourages new entrants and helps to sustain and develop a highly skilled workforce while increasing capacity to support the most vulnerable in our society.

3.5 Improving employability outcomes for young people

While a significant proportion of activity has focused on those already in the labour market or trying to find a job or move to a better job, we are delivering a number of smaller interventions for young people with a focus has been on improving educational attainment and helping young people at risk to find positive employment and training outcomes.

3.6 As members are aware, we have undertaken a review of our delivery within this workstream and, while the outcomes from our interventions in this space have been positive, there are a number of factors at play in recommending a reduced level of activity going forward, not least being the dynamic policy environment in this space. The Fair Start and Reducing Education Disadvantage (RED) policy initiatives led by Department for Education are progressing, with new interventions currently being developed. We are working closely with both EA and DE to share the learning from our successful pilot activity with the expectation that Council delivery can be 'lifted and shifted' within the context of these new initiatives.

3.7 As agreed, our work in this space is prioritised on two key areas, namely:

- Continued support for the GCSE Support Programme for a final interim year, using this time to work with the Area Partnership Boards (who deliver this programme) as well as the Education Inequalities subgroup under the Jobs, Skills & Education Board to secure a longer-term future within the context of Community Planning and Fair Start/Reducing Educational Disadvantage policy initiatives. Between September 2022 and June 2023, 434 young people were engaged, against a target of 365. These young people have been identified as being unlikely to achieve at least Grade C in GCSE English and Maths, without the additional support of the programme.
- Continuing the 'Bridges to Progression' programme within the Labour Market Partnership as outlined below, providing tailored wrap around support for

those young people at risk of disengaging from the mainstream Skills for Life & Work programmes.

3.8 Labour Market Partnership

Members will be aware that the Labour Market Partnership is an intervention supported by DfC within all 11 council areas. Resources from the Labour Market Partnership enable the Council to increase the range and scope of employability and skills activity. The LMP also provides a platform for engagement with government departments, community partners and business organisations as a means of refocusing regional programmes more effectively within the Belfast area. The LMP action plan recognises that, while there are gaps that have been identified that will necessitate the creation of new interventions, not all activity need be new 'provision' or 'programmes'; sometimes it is equally important to profile and/or promote existing interventions.

3.9 In addition to the extra support for Employment Academy places, the headline programme of work within the action plan includes the following:

- **Gateway to Choices Service**: a key issue that emerged in our engagement with the LMP partners was the need for independent advice and guidance for those who are out of work and non-job ready outside of mainstream JBO support. Partners considered that these groups (mainly long-term unemployed and economically inactive) required enhanced support to navigate the existing provision and identify the right support, at the right time, to help move them towards positive job, skills and qualification outcomes. So far this year, over 400 people have received support through Gateway to Choices. We are beginning to build good insights into participants' 'back stories' of how and why they are accessing the support; what type of support they need; what the key support resources are and where there may be gaps in the system. This presents critical learning for all advice and guidance partners and will be shared with relevant partners as the insights become more detailed
- **Digital badges**: one of the most significant skills-related challenges is the relatively high proportion of Belfast residents that have low qualifications (below level 2). We have been working alongside the RSA Cities of Learning initiative to explore how a Digital Badge could help recognise the non-accredited skills of these individuals. All Employment Academies are now digitally badged as an alternative validation of

achievement, with over 1000 badges issued to participants. In addition to this, the Council has offered 24 organisations in the city access to Digital Badging for their own participants/employees

- **Belfast Jobs Fair**: The Belfast Jobs Fair has attracted considerable interest with 70 exhibitors anticipated to exhibit on October 10th. More than 65 employers will be present and, collectively, there will be more than 1800 job available for those seeking work or a better job. The event is taking place in St George's Market
- **Inclusive Employment conference**: given the commitments identified through the Belfast Agenda to promote inclusive employment practices, officers are currently working on a large scale conference to share learning and encourage additional partner engagement in this work. To date, we have secured a number of keynote speakers for the event which is scheduled to take place in Ulster University's Belfast campus on 22 January 2024. Additional information on the event will be brought back to the committee and shared with all elected members in advance.

3.10 **Bridges to Progression**

Bridges to Progression is an intervention to support young people aged 16-17 years who are at risk of disengaging from Skills for Life & Work due to their personal circumstances. Participants can access intensive personal support to help them progress in and complete their formal training, with the ambition of improving the levels of progression into employment or further training. Previous analysis had flagged a very high level of drop out from these programmes, particularly in Belfast. It showed that the reasons behind participants no longer engaging with the programme related to wider social challenges – rather than the programme content itself.

- 3.11 At the October 2022 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, it was agreed that officers would seek expressions of interest from organisations delivering these programmes, outlining how they would use resources to add value to the core activity with the objective of improving outcomes for participants. It was also agreed that officers would undertake assessment of the applications for funding in line with the approach detailed in this report. As reported in March 2023 update, a number of organisations were awarded support, with a cumulative target of 120 young people to be engaged and 16 employers to be supported.

Since that time 193 young people have been engaged and 173 completed the Bridges to Progression intervention. We also engaged with 29 employers over this period. Direct feedback and outcomes have demonstrated the impact this investment had on these individuals. Participants on the programme reported on the following outcomes:

<u>Destination</u>	<u>% of those completing</u>
Into employment	45%
Into further training/ education	31%
Progressed within SfL&W	18%
Unsure of next step	6%

3.12 Feedback from participants about the support offered through the Bridges to Progression included:

- Helped deal with past issues and stress
- Confidence to achieve qualification and interview
- Importance of having someone to turn to for support
- Importance of self-care – looking after mental health
- See the value of positive thinking instead of negative thinking
- Having someone to talk to was amazing and helped a lot.

3.13 The average financial allocation provided for the support services offered to programme participants is around £750 per person. While this is not an expensive cost per head, it does appear to have a very positive impact on participant outcomes. Previously, only 3% of those starting the programme had a positive destination after the two years. Evidence from the pilot suggests that, for the first year at least, the positive outcome rates on the programme have significantly increased as you see above with 75% progressing onto employment or training/education and 18% progressing within the programme. Based on these positive outcomes, it is proposed that we re-run this intervention for another round of funding (note – this funding has already been approved by the Labour Market Partnership). Officers will seek applications from SfL&W providers and review these against agreed criteria. Officers are also engaging with the Department for the Economy to seek to incorporate the flexibility offered within Bridges to Progression with future iterations of Skills for Life & Work with the aim of improving employability outcomes.

- 3.14 The LMP action plans are submitted on an annual basis at this point (due to the annual budget settlements in the government departments). However, as part of the strategic assessment that underpins the plan, officers have identified a number of developmental areas where we consider that there is a need to undertake additional scoping work in order to understand the issues at play and consider whether the council might play an active delivery role in the future, or lobby government partners to do more in this space in order to improve outcomes for Belfast residents. Two of these areas relate to place-based and people-based targeted interventions, with a focus on how these might improve outcomes for participants and what approaches are most appropriate for this. We are also proposing to undertake further engagement work with partners to understand how we can connect our employer-facing services more effectively, in order to make it easier for businesses to understand the support available and access it. Updates on these development pieces will be brought back to future meetings of the committee.
- 3.15 **Collaboration with the Employability and Skills Providers**
The employability ecosystem is complex and, with the end of ESF funding in March 2023, there have been significant changes across the network. Given that our model is based on building strong partnerships across delivery partners and support organisations, the council engages on a regular basis with the provider network and links into existing networks to ensure that we are reaching specific target groups and geographical parts of the city. We have recently engaged the projects that have been successful in attracting Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) resources. We have also established a partnership with the Institute of Employability Professionals (IEP), facilitating continuous improvement and raising standards through activities such as shared learning and benchmarking and the delivery of vocationally specific employability training for those working in the sector.
- 3.16 **Partnership, policy influence and guidance**
In addition to direct delivery, officers will also continue to work with internal and external partners to use all tools at our disposal to address the key employability and skills challenges, focusing on the council's inclusive growth ambitions. There are a number of key mechanisms through which this can be achieved:

- **Social Value:** officers are working closely with the Corporate Procurement Service to support the implementation of the policy, focusing on the employability and skills measures. This includes working with council contracts – as well as contractors across the city where Social Value applies – to achieve their Social Value requirements in a meaningful way. Officers have organised a number of workshops for VCSE providers – with 60 people attending – to build capacity in tendering for council contracts. We are also organising a ‘Meet the Broker’ workshop for contractors in the city to gain access to E&S provision across the city
- **Peace Plus funding:** we are currently engaging with partner organisations to develop project concepts for the Peace Plus 1.1 Local Action Plan. Ideas under development include ‘Language Up’: a project that will deliver community-based language classes for migrants and those from minority ethnic communities. This has been repeatedly identified as a barrier to engagement among those groups.

3.17 Finance and Resource Implications

The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2023/24 budget for the Employability & Skills section of the Place and Economy departmental budget that was approved as part of the 2023/24 estimates.

3.18 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

Each of the proposed projects referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. New projects or service areas are equality screened and a rural needs assessment completed. Consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts at the initial stages of project development. A new CRM system has been established to enable officers to regularly review participant engagement and address any equality or good relations issues arising.”

During discussion, the Employability and Skills Manager explained further the employment rates and retention of participants of the schemes and highlighted that the assessment of where interventions were needed continued throughout the year. She highlighted that there were more than 1,000 visitors at the recent Belfast Jobs Fair which had taken place in St. George’s Market.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the work which had been undertaken in the financial year to date and the positive employability and jobs outcomes associated with the work; and
- Approved the allocation of the Labour Market Partnership (LMP) resources for Bridges to Progression and noted the proposals to seek proposals from delivery partners to provide targeted support that could improve outcomes for participants.

**Social Enterprise Call for Evidence –
draft Belfast City Council response**

The Director of Economic Development reported that a consultation exercise had recently been launched by the Department for the Economy (DfE) regarding support for the social enterprise sector.

He advised that Members would be aware that, similar to enterprise support, the policy responsibility for social enterprise remained with the DfE. Delivery responsibility for social enterprise support transferred to local authorities in 2015 as part of the wider transfer of entrepreneurship support. Since then, councils had supported social enterprises to start and grow both through the Go for It programme and through various ERDF-funded business growth programmes at an individual council level.

He explained that the new Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service (NISS) included a target of 10 per cent of businesses engaged or supported to be social enterprises. As a result, delivery partners were developing a programme of targeted support to increase the number of social enterprises accessing support.

He pointed out that, outside of council-funded activity, there had been very limited direct support provided to social enterprises from other government departments. DfE currently funded Social Enterprise NI (SENI) to undertake a range of networking and good practice support. He informed the Committee that the financial allocation to this work was very limited in scope and had not increased since LGR. He highlighted that SENI performed an important network and engagement function but it did not have the capacity for significant service delivery and relied on councils to play that role. He advised that their current three-year work programme would come to an end in March 2024.

The Director of Economic Development reported that, in early September 2023, DfE had issued a call for evidence and was seeking responses to a draft one-year action plan, which was to go live from April 2024. This action plan included a greater focus on the outcomes that the Department would like to see, particularly those aligned to the 10X economic vision. The deadline for responses was 31st October, 2023. The department had indicated that it then planned to commission the delivery of many of the services outlined in the consultation in November 2023.

He outlined that the proposed workplan included four themes:

- Theme one: Promotion of social enterprises to promote individual business growth;
- Theme two: Strategic sector growth;
- Theme three: Cooperation and coordination; and
- Theme four: Research.

He pointed out that an initial review of the work plan ([Appendix 1](#)) suggested significant overlap with the work planned as part of the Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service.

The consultation was focused around four key questions, namely:

1. What are your views on the overall approach of the work programme – connecting a smaller number of objectives to the activities required and the outcomes that would demonstrate success?
2. What are your views on the four proposed objectives?
3. Do you have any comments on any of the objectives in the proposed work programme?
4. Are there other measures of success you would like to propose for any of the activities?

The Director of Economic Development advised that a draft Council response was attached at [Appendix 2](#). The response was structured along the lines of the four questions set out above. The key points, in summary, included:

- Opportunity for greater alignment with NIESS work – with a proposal for additional engagement to consider how this could work more effectively, including an opportunity for DfE to provide additional resources to councils to carry out this work;
- Agreement around scope and focus of the social enterprise work – and the potential to give this greater visibility through a joint work plan; and
- Potential to take a more coherent approach to considering how social enterprises were supported across government (for example social value in procurement; increasing social enterprises in the supply chain).

He highlighted that the Council had, for many years, delivered a dedicated programme of work to support social enterprises. This work was led by Work West. In the last financial year, 27 workshops and outreach sessions had been delivered for the sector, attracting more than 320 attendees. 45 people had received one to one

mentoring support totalling more than 1500 hours. He advised that the Council had also supported the creation of 93 jobs in both social enterprises and cooperatives. He highlighted that the Council had won the “council of the year” award at the Social Enterprise NI Awards in 2022 and was in the running for the same award this year.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Agreed to submit a response to the Department for Economy on its call for evidence on social enterprise; and
- Noted and approved the draft response attached as [Appendix 2](#) of the report.

Strategic and Operational Issues

Proposed Committee Workshops

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an overview of forthcoming Committee Workshops:

NIHE Workshop

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) presented an Annual Update on the Housing Investment Plan to a Special meeting of the People and Communities Committee on 6th September, 2023, at which the Committee had agreed that a Workshop would be convened with the NIHE to specifically discuss Housing Need and Demand. Given the synergy of this across to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee priorities and the Committee plan in relation to maximising housing development and regeneration opportunities, the Committee were asked to consider attendance at this forthcoming workshop.

Challenges and opportunities to regeneration and development workshop

A joint City Growth and Regeneration Committee and Planning Committee Workshop was proposed to ensure alignment and consider challenges and opportunities from a development, planning and regeneration perspective that would ultimately benefit the city and its communities.

Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028 Committee Workshop

Following agreement by the Committee, at its meeting September 2023, to hold a Committee Workshop as part of the development of a new Corporate Plan, the Director of City Regeneration and Development advised that this had been scheduled for 25th October and was intended to be an in-person workshop with further details to follow.

The Committee:

- Noted the agreement of the People and Communities Committee to hold a workshop with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on housing need and demand, and City Growth and Regeneration Committee attendance at this;

- Agreed to hold a joint Committee workshop with the Planning Committee, with a focus on challenges and opportunities in relation to the regeneration and development of the city, date to be agreed; and
- Noted the proposed Committee Workshop scheduled for Wednesday, 25th October in relation to the new Corporate Plan.

Notice of Motion Quarterly Update

The Committee was provided with a quarterly update on the Notices of Motion that it was responsible for and considered the information which had been reported.

During discussion, in relation to Motion 289 - *Translink - Night-time provision of services*, one Member suggested the need to progress the issue and invite representatives from Translink to attend a future Committee to discuss the issue.

During further discussion, in response to a Member's request for an update on Motion 217 - *Tourism Street Signage*, the Director of Economic Development advised that the research was ongoing and a report would be submitted to the Committee in January for consideration.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the updates to all the Motions that the Committee was responsible for as referenced in [Appendix 1](#);
- Agreed to the closure of 2 Motions, as referenced in Appendix 1 and noted in paragraph 3.4 of the report; and
- Agreed to invite Translink to attend a future Committee to discuss its night-time provision of services, in relation to Motion 289.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Late Night Public Transport (Councillor Murray to raise)

Councillor Murray outlined his concerns in relation to the potential for night-time public transport services to be cancelled over the Christmas period.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to write to Translink to encourage the night-time provision of services over the Christmas Period and to clarify its plans on for the Winter months.

Chairperson